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SUBJECT: CLIMATE CHANGE: UNGA TO KEEP BUSY TEMPO

USUN NEW Y 00000151 001.2 OF 002

Summary

¶1. (U) The General Assembly's February 11-13 thematic debate on climate change highlighted the role of the UN system in responding to the global challenges and potential solutions to that problem. Several delegations directed comments, both good and bad, at the U.S., with island states providing some of the sharpest rhetoric. Coming so soon after the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) ministerial of December, delegations were nearly universal in their cautious optimism over the Bali Roadmap, despite daunting challenges in achieving a new international agreement by ¶2009. The General Assembly President announced plans to hold two further GA debates on climate change in coming months, to focus on vulnerable states and corporate responsibility and sustainability. USUN Charge D'Affaires Wolff delivered the U.S. statement on February 12, providing feedback to the Secretariat report and describing inter alia USG initiatives

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in partnerships and technology sharing. End summary.

Looking Inward

¶2. (U) In what has become a annual exercise for General Assembly presidents, PGA Srgjan Kerim convened on February 11-13 a special thematic debate "Addressing Climate Change: The United Nations and the World at Work." The debate featured one day of panel discussions focusing on public-private partnerships and the roles of UN agencies in addressing climate change, and two days of national

statements in plenary session. Guest speakers and panelists included Slovenia President Turk, New York Mayor Bloomberg, Virgin Group Chairman Sir Richard Branson, activist/actress Daryl Hannah, and former New York Governor George Pataki. In contrast to the Secretary-General's high-level climate change event last September, this debate drew ministerial-level attendance from only 20 states.

13. (U) The UN Secretariat made clear that it hoped to receive feedback and guidance from member states on its comprehensive report outlining the climate change activities of each UN agency and proposals for future action. Predictably, however, most delegations directed their comments to aspirations for the UNFCCC negotiation process and to describing their own national efforts. Antigua and Barbuda, speaking on behalf of the 130 states of the "Group of 77 and China", nevertheless criticized the Secretariat report for going beyond its limited mandate by presupposing activities that require intergovernmental decision by member states. Conversely Slovenia, speaking on behalf of the European Union, gave hearty support to UN efforts toward a more coordinated approach and advocated for strengthened international environmental governance. At the end of the debate, the PGA announced he would seek further detail on the UN Secretariat's future plans.

National Statements: Good, Bad and Frantic

14. (SBU) For the most part, statements by national delegations contained the standard litany of popular catch-phrases ("historical responsibility", "common but differentiated responsibility") and pleas for assistance in the form of unconditional aid, technology transfer, capacity building, waiver of intellectual property rights, and new financial mechanisms. Almost every delegation, however,

USUN NEW Y 00000151 002.2 OF 002

expressed cautious optimism on the "Bali Roadmap" outcome of the UNFCCC ministerial in December and its ambitious target of 2009 for a comprehensive new international agreement, and reaffirmed that the UNFCCC is the UN body responsible for climate change negotiations. USUN Charge D'Affaires Wolff delivered the U.S. statement on February 12, providing feedback to the Secretariat report and describing inter alia USG initiatives in partnerships and technology sharing (full text is available on the USUN website under "press releases" at: www.usunnewyork.usmission.gov).

15. (U) Positive references to the U.S.-initiated Major Economies Meeting process were made by Indonesia, France and Iceland. Libya made explicit reference to the upcoming Washington International Renewable Energy Conference, while Belarus reiterated its call for a special GA thematic debate on renewable energy and energy efficiency. Mauritius and Japan also noted the new multilateral Clean Technology Fund (a U.S. initiative with Japan and UK support).

16. (SBU) Concerns or criticisms, both implicit and explicit, were likewise pointed toward the U.S. Russia, Nigeria, St. Vincent and Grenadines, and Bolivia raised concerns about biofuels and food security. China deemed the Bali Roadmap a success for having "incorporated the Annex I party that had not approved the (Kyoto) Protocol," while Norway gratuitously called on "industrialized nations, such as Norway and the U.S." to make sweeping emissions reductions. Bolivia, Nicaragua and Cuba denounced the injustice of "unbridled consumption and production patterns" and "monopolization" of clean technology by industrialized states like the U.S. India's PermRep quoted the Gospel of Saint Thomas that states, "blessed are the poor for they have saved the earth," and then deadpanned that "now would be the time for the rich to do something."

17. (U) Small island states were particularly animated in

declaring over the "time for mind-numbing debate" (Papua New Guinea) and calling for immediate action even pending a new agreement. Palau called upon the UN Security Council to take on climate change as a "threat to peace" under Articles 39, 40 and 41 of the UN Charter and to "consider the imposition of mandatory emission caps on all states and use its power to sanction in order to encourage compliance." Papua New Guinea denounced the "hubris" of "certain industrialized nations who promote emissions reductions in certain developing countries as a precondition for taking responsibility for carbon emissions at home."

More Debate Coming

[18](#). (SBU) Despite an intense calendar of negotiations under the UNFCCC on the basis of the Bali Roadmap, as well as events by countless UN bodies that will focus on climate change issues, General Assembly President Srgjan Kerim ended this thematic debate with an announcement that he will convene two additional GA debates: "One will focus on the needs and concerns of vulnerable countries and the other one on corporate responsibility and sustainability." Papua New Guinea's popular plea for an end to mind-numbing debate appears to have gone unheeded.
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